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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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The Art of Teambuilding: Reflections of a Commander, 200 Days in Rawah, Iraq

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** The Art of Teambuilding: Reflections of a Commander

**Author:** Major Sean T. Quinlan, USMC

**Thesis:** Leaders that integrate values into all facets of teambuilding, using elements of spirit such as mottoes, symbols, history, and records of high performance to maximize advantage, will experience success in any type of conflict.

**Discussion:** Our unit was like many units that go into Iraq or Afghanistan, for example, we had the youngest company with the least amount of combat experience and we had ten months to prepare. In order to establish a sense of identity within a unit there must be a foundation, therefore, we introduced a cadre within the company of combat veterans who would be detaching in the next six months to assist the unit in preparing the new Marines. Additionally, we implemented tenets of leadership that provided the framework for preparing the company for combat. the "*The Delta Five.*" They were the leadership tenets that became the bedrock of our company, "*The Delta Five*" was instrumental in our preparation for and execution of combat operations in Iraq. Our unit cohesion established before we departed also was key in a very dynamic COIN Environment. Empowerment and education of your Non-Commissioned Officers in the areas of; human terrain, culture, and history will paid great dividends while operating in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. I will present and discuss useful techniques as well as the challenges we faced while operating in a urban environment conducting COIN operations. To a great extent the content of this paper is derived from personal experience, observations, and lessons learned that has been acquired during more than 22 years of service.

**Conclusion:** Each time Delta Company Team encountered an obstacle, they responded with vigor, energy, and raw determination, which evident throughout their deployment in the Al Anbar Province, Iraq. Delta Company success was due to focused training, leadership, and unit cohesion. We must continue to generate an atmosphere that fosters empowerment and mission accomplishment attitude.

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## Preface

In order to frame the presentation of “Teambuilding”: A Reflection of a Commander. I will present an analysis of several fundamental concepts and elements of teambuilding strategy. First, I will open with an event that took place during combat operations in Iraq depicting the importance of small unit leadership. Second, I will examine the leadership tenets that were the foundation of our company and their relevance to our success in our preparation for and execution of operations in combat. Third, I will present and discuss useful techniques as well as the challenges we faced while operating in a urban environment conducting COIN operations. To a great extent the content of this paper is derived from personal experience, observations, and lessons learned that has been acquired during more than 22 years of service.

In preparing this paper, I would like to acknowledge the innumerable dialogues with leaders both enlisted and officer at all levels. They provided valuable insights, feedback, and validation of the fundamentals of teambuilding. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Dr. Paolo G. Tripodi Director of Bren Chair of Ethics and Leadership at Marine Corps University, USMC Command and Staff College, in preparing this paper.

Finally, I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Renforth, my battalion commander. His vast combat experience allowed him to tailor a blueprint that set the battalion up for success. The great leaders are the ones who get their subordinates to believe in the plan and convince them why they should be proud of it. Lieutenant Colonel Renforth possessed the ability to foster an unbelievable esprit within our unit that was contagious to all. As a result, our battalion experienced a great deal of success.

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<b>ABSTRACT (MAXIMUM 200 WORDS)</b>  <p>Developing cohesion within a unit and the will to fight is one of the greatest challenges a leader will face. Leadership, training, and small unit leadership are three essential aspects when teambuilding. Unit values integrated into all facets, using elements of spirit such as mottoes, symbols, history, and records of high performance to maximum advantage. Essentially, these are ways to establish a unit's identity. Empowerment and education of your NCO's in the areas of; human terrain, culture, and history will pay great dividends operating in the COIN environment. Credibility with the local populace and establishing a foundation of trust was a result of unit cohesion and training established prior to our deployment to Iraq. When do you know you have won the hearts and minds? When locals prevent your Marines from being blown up by IED's and point out local insurgents. The common thread evident in leaders who create exceptional units are those who can create unit identity</p>			
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## I. INTRODUCTION

On September 26, 2006 Delta Company, Second Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (D Co, 2D LAR Bn) assumed battle-space, (i.e. a specific area in which military units occupy and are responsible for during combat operations) in Rawah, Iraq, a city on the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV) in. Three days later the First Marine Division Assistant Division Commander (ADC), Brigadier General Nellar, along with one of his battalion commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Renforth, conducted dismounted patrols in and around the Joint Coordination Center (JCC). The JCC was on northern edge of Rawah, and designated the home for the Marines and Sailors of Delta Company for the next seven months. Co-located with D Co at the JCC were the Iraqi Army (IA) and Iraqi Police (IP) from Rawah. During my initial assessment of the JCC, my greatest concern was the lack of structural force protection, which gave unfettered access to the JCC by non-uniformed individuals. Prior to Brigadier General Nellar's departure from the JCC he addressed the Marines and emphasized the importance of aggressive foot patrols and how those patrols directly correlated with winning the hearts and minds of the local populace. The ADC ensured us that we would receive cement barriers and force protection materials required. Despite this promise, his final comment was, "Maintain your vigilance and improvise with what you have." One hour after Brigadier General Nellar and Lieutenant Colonel Renforth departed from the JCC, the enemy let their presence be known.

Enemy forces opened fire with a coordinated machinegun and rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack, which generated chaos. Two RPG rounds struck the JCC on the east and south side sending blast fragmentation throughout the building. Unbeknownst to D Co., a water

tanker truck approached the entry control point (ECP) from the north while the company focused their efforts on recovering from the RPG attack.

As the company organized for a counterattack, the water truck with a 1,000 lb Suicide Vehicle Bourne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) and a single 1,000 lb inert training bomb filled with fragmentation material closed in on JCC. Lance Corporal's Horton and Presley were the two Marines guarding the ECP when the vehicle approached their position. Their communication with the company operation center (COC) was not working and they made the decision to fire 120 rounds of machinegun ammunition and 20 rounds of M-16 ammunition at the approaching vehicle. The driver was mortally wounded and the vehicle blew up. The detonation sent shrapnel and vehicle parts throughout the compound and adjoining neighborhoods of the JCC. The corporal of the guard quickly reinforced the rooftop sentries and the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) platoon conducted immediate security patrols. These actions by Delta Company Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) during this intense attack prevented the enemy from consolidating and re-attacking the JCC.

Lieutenant Colonel Cavanaugh described today's NCOs when he wrote, "It is the hardened NCO who provides the inspirational leadership that drives the Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) and commissioned officers into their operational leadership positions while simultaneously inspiring and setting the example for our more junior Marines."

<sup>1</sup> The small unit leaders (SUL) were challenged from the first day on the ground and throughout the seven months in Iraq. The NCOs met the challenge head-on and made difficult decisions that were life and death in nature as well as tactical choices that had strategic consequences. The Delta Company NCOs shaped their own character — and that of their men — through sheer will, relentlessly chose action over inaction in a challenging counter

insurgency (COIN) environment. Each time Delta Company Team encountered an obstacle, they responded with vigor, energy, and raw determination, which evident throughout their deployment in the Al Anbar Province, Iraq. Delta Company success was due to focused training, leadership, and unit cohesion.

## II. PRE-DEPLOYMENT

The majority commanders I have served with believe that during their time as a commander they will be able to make subtle improvements over time and upon their departure the unit is a little better then when they accepted it. I was no different in that regard, but the key was in convincing 140 Marines and Sailors that they were capable of achieving whatever mission we are tasked with regardless of its complexity. In assuming command, it was important to assess the unit's history in order to decide the future direction of the company. The company had returned three months prior from Iraq and they fought with distinction in, and around, Fallajuh, Iraq. Unfortunately, they suffered 40 wounded and seven killed as a result of intense fighting in their Area of Operation (AO). Many Marines completed their second combat tours and were mentally and physically fatigued. One hundred and twenty of these combat veterans were going to detach from D Co either to execute permanent change of station (PCS) orders or to separate from the Marine Corps. It was important to collect personal accounts of these Marines experiences before they departed. The prevailing mindset was, "we have been there and done that" and all we need to do is maintain the status quo. As the old axiom goes, *why fix it when it's not broken*. The mindset of the seasoned combat veterans had to change. There was resistance to change, but everyone knew that in today's operating environment, change is constant and transformation is necessary.<sup>2</sup>

My initial analysis of the company concluded that morale was low. I understood the challenges ahead in trying to motivate and rally a unit. Positive recognition and sense of purpose would be extremely important to them because of their current frame of mind. To start improving conditions we established a cadre within D Co tasked to prepare the new Marines from the School of Infantry. Second, we built a cadre of Marines with as many as three combat tours. Newly arriving Marines to the company were awed of the extensive experience that the cadre possessed. The new Marines were also eager to hone their combat skills and heed the lessons learned from the company's combat veterans. Finally, the company leadership had to ensure there was not an "us versus them" mentality. In order to accomplish this, we carefully selected NCOs who would provide the leadership and mentoring necessary to prepare them for combat.

**a. Building The Team:**

American Heritage's Dictionary defines a team as; "A group of people linked in to a common purpose or a unit characterized as a group regarded as a distinct entity within a larger group."<sup>3</sup> Countless of books have been published in the art of teambuilding and leadership, but based these definitions I believe one of most important aspects of team building is the leader's ability to inspire his men. In a conversation with Lieutenant Colonel David C. Garza in 1997, he stated, "The title of leader comes from above, but leaders are selected by those they lead and Marines will follow you if you have vision, a plan, and convince them that you care about them and their family."<sup>4</sup> General Garza was implying that it was the job of the commanding officer to foster an environment that breeds an attitude of team above self.

Trust was non-negotiable within D Co and it was imperative that all members of the company understood the importance of trust in building a unit to go to war. In a sense, I had to

win the “hearts and minds” of the Marines and Sailors of Delta Company. The critical link that provided leadership and direction to the Marines was the NCOs, SNCOs and officers. In order to convince the company leadership of the direction the company needed to move in, I had to get them to believe in my blueprint for D Co.

The word “**BELIEVE**” has many meanings, however, I used the three E’s from believe to describe the unity of effort required by the company leadership in order to establish trust and confidence among our subordinates. The first (E) represented enthusiasm, which embodied the strength of character and commitment to each other necessary for building a cohesive team. The second (E) was effort. We would demand from ourselves, as well as the Marines, an effort that reflected our dedication to the mission. The third (E) was empowerment. Empowerment is a leadership indicator that enables subordinate leaders the ability to reach their highest levels of professional development.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, through personal observation there is a category of leaders who do not empower. I concluded based on personal interaction with officers in this category that they were insecure and afraid something negative would occur on their watch. The type of fighting taking place in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) is at the squad, platoon, and company levels forcing commanders to employ the smaller units. Thus, young Marine NCO’s who was not afforded the opportunity to have responsibility or training to operate with autonomy in pre-deployment training are forced to learn on the dangerous streets of Iraq and mountains of Afghanistan. Delta Company Marine NCO’s, SNCOs, and officers were empowered. They not only were challenged to train their junior Marines, but more importantly, they were subjected to training exercises that infused friction in order to replicate the fog of war that they would encounter in Iraq.

### b. Adversity

"Hard times will come. They always do. But when it does remember that an unwavering commitment and hard work will turn adversity into a triumph."<sup>6</sup> Lou Holtz's quote was relevant before, during and after Delta Company's deployment. For purposes of this research adversity is defined as, "A condition of suffering, or affliction, a disastrous experience often implying to the previous prosperity or well being."<sup>7</sup> Units are often challenged when the conditions are wet, cold, hot, or the enemy is shooting at you and men are dying. Conversely, another measure stick for success is gauged by a unit's accomplishments. Such as; annual training statistics, vehicle readiness rates, and more field time than any other unit. Those areas are extremely important in preparing a unit for combat, however, I believe a unit's greatest challenge and finest hour is how they respond during challenging times. These difficult situations reveal a unit's character and camaraderie. It is then, when true character is revealed. Booker T. Washington rightly noted that, "Success should never be determined by where an organization is currently, but more by the obstacles they have overcome to get where they are currently at."<sup>8</sup> When I first assumed command of Delta Company they had experienced more adversity than any other company in the battalion. The company had more Killed In Action (KIA) and Wounded In Action (WIA), additionally, the company had six alcohol and three drug violations and twenty three out of twenty five vehicles were unable to operate because of mechanical deficiencies. I was approached by platoon commanders and SNCO's from the company who stated the command climate was poor, there was no sense of unity, and the company had no identity. I listened and allowed them to vent, but was adamant that we not focus on the past, but learn from it. In order to re-establish an identity for Delta Company we used a variety of metaphors in explaining what we were going to accomplish.

The Initial observations of the company revealed that the Marines did not identify as members of a unit, but as individuals. The company leadership wanted the Marines to identify themselves as the “Outlaws” from Delta Company first. To build a unit, the company leadership attempted to infuse pride within the unit by using the analogy of building house to explain to every Marine the importance of building a highly effective and cohesive team. There were three components in the analogy of building the house. Eleven blocks of granite represented the eleven sergeants of the company, and served as the foundation of the house. There were six pillars of strength which represented the SNCO’s that supported the roof which sheltered the house. There were eight yard dogs who were the corporals and were the company’s first line of defense that protected the integrity of the house and instilled discipline in the junior Marines. Within three months of introducing the house analogy to the company, the following observations were noted. First, the number of vehicles that were operational went from one out twenty-five to twenty-five of twenty-five. Second, the drug related incidents decreased from three out of one hundred and forty to zero. Furthermore, the number of alcohol related incidents decreased from six out of one hundred and forty to zero maintained this trend for six months. This data points to a conclusion that the overt attempt by the company leadership to instill a sense of identity resulted in a measurable improvement in the performance of the company. To bolster these improvements and performance the company leadership introduced the concept of “*The Delta Five*.”

### **III. THE DELTA FIVE**

American Heritage’s Dictionary defines the word tenet as, “A principle, belief, or doctrine to be held true, especially, one held in common by members of an organization movement or profession.”<sup>9</sup> “*The Delta Five*” became the tenets of leadership that would serve

as the foundation for the Delta Company's vision. *The Delta Five* were: Commitment to excellence, fundamentally sound, attention to detail, pride of ownership, and discipline. Beginning with the first tenet of the Delta Five, a strong commitment to excellence, the meaning is best described by the words of Vince Lombardi when he said, "*The quality of each man's life is the full measure of that man's personal commitment to excellence and to victory-whether it be football, politics, government, or combat.*"<sup>10</sup>

The word "excellence" comes from the Latin word that mean "to rise out of."<sup>7</sup> The company leadership reinforced to the men of Delta Company that they competed against no one except themselves. The leadership also reinforced that if the men were willing to pay the price of hard work and sacrifice they could be the measuring stick of excellence throughout Second Marine Division. To attain this level of proficiency our standards were raised to a level higher than they had been in the previous three months. The challenge that surfaced was to create a comprehensive training plan that encompassed eight different Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) and ensured that each Marine was proficient in their MOS. In addition to meeting the training objectives, we had competitions within the company that unified the marines and motivated them to focus their talent and energy on the team.

One great example of a strong commitment to excellence was displayed during our semi-annual gunnery qualification. This qualification was the capstone exercise for LAV-25 vehicle crew. The qualification tests the driver, gunner, and vehicle commander's ability to successfully acquire and engage multiple targets at unknown distances with the M-242 25 mm Chain Gun as well as the M-240 coaxial machinegun. Additionally, in order to prepare for this challenging evolution, over 200 hours of training and instruction went into the preparation. The company master gunner (MG) is the important Marine in the process because he creates a

comprehensive training plan to prepare the Marines for qualification. Unfortunately, Delta Company did not have a MG. The MG is a school trained NCO or SNCO responsible to the commanding officer for the training and execution of all vehicle crews within the company. The second obstacle was that we had no experience at LAV-25 gunner position; therefore, the expectations for our success was low. The Battalion MG, who is responsible to the battalion commander for all five company's training and qualifications, anticipated lengthy remediation cycle due to the lack of experience at the gunner position. The "*Young Guns*" of Delta Company, whose nickname was given to them because of their youth, uncanny swagger, and their rank was not commensurate with the billet they held as gunners. Most gunner positions are held by corporals and very seldom does a lance corporal get an opportunity to qualify during gunnery. Delta Company had no gunners above the rank of Lance Corporal in fact we had two (PFCs) and one Private behind the sights. The "*Young Guns*" would write their first chapter in the annals of LAR history by being the youngest gunners ever qualify during a semi-annual gunnery qualification and then serve in combat. Having served in the LAR as both enlisted and as an officer during my entire career, there has never been a company without a NCOs behind the sights of a 25 mm weapon system. The "*Young Guns of Delta*" out-gunned the other four LAR companies during 2D LAR Bn Semi-Annual Gunnery Qualification in 2006. Again, emphasizing the importance of leadership, "*Young Gun's*" superior performance emanated from the synergy of extraordinary unit cohesion and superb NCO leadership, which resulted in organizational trust. Our scouts and weapon's platoon experienced similar success utilizing the same building block approach to training used by the LAV crewman.

Building off the previous tenet focused on excellence the second tenet of being fundamentally sound emerges. Brilliance in the basics is what our battalion commander

preached. He said to me, "No team is capable of winning regardless of the offensive and defensive schemes unless players can execute the fundamentals." I used a similar analogy of preparing a football team for the season to illustrate the meaning of being fundamentally sound.

A football team evolves in three phases; the first phase is the rigors of two fatiguing practices a day known, as two a days, the second phase is referred to as pre-season form and finally, the third phase being the season itself. Initially, the team spends a significant amount of time learning basic formations and plays. The team struggles at first, but then begins to reap the benefits of disciplined execution. Ultimately, precise execution of the plays becomes second nature and the team's focus turns to exploiting the opposing team's weakness. During the training process the platoons began to develop a competitive attitude in everything they did. Just like a football team learning its basic formations and plays, Immediate Actions Drills and Techniques Tactics and Procedures serve to provide the unit with combat repetition, which allows their drills to be second nature. Analogous to the opposing forces or the enemy combatant challenges the skill of the Marine to draw on the repetitive training they received. Our continual repetition of rudimentary platoon critical tasks that supported the unit Mission Essential Task List (METL) brought the company to the highest level of proficiency prior our deployment. Doing the little things that units don't want to do is what separates the great units from the average units.<sup>11</sup>

Each tenet of "*The Delta Five*" compliments the other tenets. Everything from maintenance, formations, physical training, weapons handling, live fire, and first aid skills were areas we paid close attention to detail, the third tenet of "*The Delta Five*." As the old axiom goes, *little things make a big difference*. Prior to every training exercise, there were

operations orders issued, followed by a sand table exercise, and then rehearse the conduct of the training event. Many would say the above methodology is how every battalion or company's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) should be. I would argue it was not done at the level of detail required to execute a comprehensive training plan. As a result, valuable training time and opportunities was lost. If a realistic training environment is not fostered efficiently and there is not a focused approach to training, the confidence of the Marines in their leadership will wane and the esprit within the unit will begin to deteriorate.

The fourth tenet of the "*The Delta Five*", pride of ownership, is best described by the words of Antoine Henri Jomini when he said, "For a unit to cultivate a military spirit and have pride in their unit, they must have a sense of history and endure an arduous training regime that would expose their units to extreme fatigue, keep them from stagnating in garrison during peacetime, and arouse their enthusiasm by all means available in harmony of their frame of mind."<sup>12</sup>

Again, we used another sports analogy to articulate our tenet in a way that would be understood by all. We compared Delta Company to the stockholders of the Green Bay Packers football team, the only National Football League team owned by the local residents. *Esprit De Corps*, or pride within a unit, starts with a singleness of purpose and discipline. First, in order to achieve pride of ownership, I knew the men had to feel a part of the Marines and Sailors of 2D LAR. Although our battalion has only been in existence for twenty three years, they have participated in every operation since their inception in 1985 to include; Operation's JUST CAUSE in Panama, DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, ALLIED FORCE in Kosovo, SUPPORT DEMOCRACY in Haiti, OEF and OIF.

The NCOs were tasked with researching conflicts that Delta Company participated in and then gave classes on Delta Company's involvement in those conflicts. In addition, the NCOs started a new tradition that infused pride. Every Monday after battalion formation, the company would take ten minutes together and the NCO's would read a Medal of Honor Citation to the entire company. This ritual became so popular that Marines asked if they could bestow honor on fallen Marines they had lost in previous deployments to OEF and OIF. After this weekly dedication the company would come together and raise the D Co colors in the sky and on the count of three one hundred forty Marines and Sailors, would shout "Outlaws." This tradition is how we began every week.

Our fifth and final tenet of "*The Delta Five*" was discipline, and it was cement that kept "*The Delta Five*" together. Delta Company Marines mastered their profession as a result of a disciplined training plan. The NCOs were relentless in their repetition of IA drills and TTPs. You instill discipline by doing something over and over, by repetition and rote, especially in combat when you have very little time to decide what your going to do when someone attacks you. "Discipline is not what you do to a unit, but what you do for them."<sup>13</sup> Everything becomes second nature, therefore, establishing good habits. During our seven months in Iraq the Marines and ISF were attacked frequently and as a result, Marines and ISF forces suffered casualties. The first impulse by Marines and ISF was to seek retribution, however, they displayed extreme self-discipline. The self-restraint exercised in addition to adhering to the Rules of Engagement (ROE) resulted in no Law Of War violations in our AO. No innocent civilians were killed or wounded by the Marines of Delta Company during their seven-month deployment. Delta Company's discipline was one of the many aspects that proved to be instrumental in winning the "Hearts and Minds" of the people of Rawah, Iraq. In

essence, “*The Delta Five*”, was vital in setting the conditions for the development of a lethal and cohesive unit that could function with efficiency and autonomously in a dynamic ever-changing and chaotic environment. Furthermore, our discipline and application of “*The Delta Five*”, contributed significantly toward building a disciplined team that was mentally and physically prepared for combat.

#### **IV. THE MISSION:**

In the summer of 2006 our battalion executed training at Mojave Viper and did exceptionally well in all facets of the training. Before our return to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, Brigadier General Nellar addressed us via Video Tele-Conference from Iraq and gave us our mission. Our mission would be to establish freedom of movement of the Theater Lines of Communication that run east and west from the Syrian and Jordanian Borders. However, one month prior to our departure our mission changed significantly. Delta Company would have to demonstrate its flexibility and adapt to new mission.

The new mission was, “To Train and develop the IA and Iraqi Police IP in Rawah, Iraq while disrupting Anti Iraqi Forces Command and Control and their freedom of movement In Order To promote stability and security in our AO and support the development of the local, district, and Provincial Governments” Simply put, protect the people and reduce the sanctuaries for the insurgents and train and equip the ISF.

**a. Transfer Of Authority** (Is when a unit assumes battle-space responsibility from another unit)

The unit we replaced had been in their current battle-space for three months and unfortunately, had six Marines and one Sailor killed in the last month and half of their deployment. The unit they replaced was an Army cavalry unit with over 1,000 soldiers. The

Army cavalry unit had twenty vehicles hit by IEDs and suffered numerous casualties throughout their eleven months. Both units operated out of a Combat Outpost (COP) approximately six kilometers from the city and conducted mostly mounted-patrols in and around the cities Rawah and Anah, Iraq. The outgoing unit was one-third the size of the Army unit that they replaced, therefore, the majority patrols were mounted patrols in order to cover the large battle-space. Delta Company received a professional turnover and the information flow between small unit leaders was excellent.

#### **V. Rawah: “A City with a Future”**

Rawah, Iraq is a city of approximately 28,000 people, and lies along the shores of the Euphrates River in Western Al Anbar, Province, 150 miles northwest of Baghdad. Al Anbar Province shares a border with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. These lengthy borders provide access to insurgents who utilized smuggling routes and open desert to gain access to the cities along Western Euphrates River Valley. The city of Rawah was a sanctuary for terrorists as they made their way eastward toward the cities of Ramadi, Fallujah and Baghdad. In preparation for “*The Surge*” (Influx of 20,000 Soldiers and Marines to reduce safe-havens in and around Baghdad, Iraq) in the summer of 2006, U.S. forces were redirected throughout Iraq. The insurgents anticipated the surge, and went underground. As a result, the insurgents would go to the smaller cities along the Western Euphrates River Valley. Senior U.S. military leadership countered by directing coalition military units into those sanctuaries and occupied COPs in order to disrupt the insurgent’s freedom of maneuver within the Al Anbar Province. Prior to units moving in and around the cities the insurgents implemented a very effective

murder and intimidation (MI) campaign among the people, local leadership and IP Forces. The IP numbers in our AO began to dwindle as the killing increased. The tipping point for the IP in Rawah occurred a week prior to our arrival when one of their IP's was beheaded and his head displayed in front of IP station.

## VI. COMMANDERS REFLECTION

Prior to our departure I read after action reports from previous commanders as well as countless articles written on counterinsurgency (COIN). The most insightful information we used was derived from Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen's article, "Twenty Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency." Knowing the insurgents relied heavily on members of the population for concealment, sustenance, and recruits, we knew we had to isolate the insurgent from the people. Before we could effectively pursue the insurgents we had to *know their turf* (neighborhoods and layout of the city) as if it was their own neighborhood in the United States.<sup>14</sup> The only way to accomplish this was to aggressively patrol throughout the city with both mounted and dismounted patrols. Initially, our company operated from the COP as the two units prior to us did, but we discovered early that we were unable to get any human intelligence on the people by not living among them. The vast majority of Iraqi Citizens perception in Rawah of D Co was, according to the local IP, that the Americans were isolated on their base with running water, generators, and constant source of fuel. They come into our city twice a day with their big vehicles, patrolling our streets and pointing their weapons pointed at our men, woman, and children."<sup>15</sup> Within two weeks we moved into the city and our focus was to live among the citizens in order to understand their problems on a personal level. We occupied the IP Station with Sunni IP, and Shite IA. This

afforded our company the opportunity to execute combined patrols with the Iraqi Security Force (ISF).

Knowing the road networks of Rawah, the efficiency was a force multiplier.. Upon our arrival, the city leadership went into hiding because they might be insurgent targets. When we occupied the city, attacks increased as demonstrated by our fourth day at the JCC when a SVBIED attempted to blow up our patrol-base. The SVBIED attempt was prevented by the two Marines at the ECP. The attacks did not deter the efforts of our Marines and our ability to become familiar with back alleys, streets and unlit roads of Rawah. The Marines were able to operate without the need to look at imagery or maps. The knowledge of the terrain and patrolling effort reduced the insurgent's ability to operate affectively in Rawah.

Our next step was to start the laborious task of executing census patrols of the local populace. The desired result was to issue ID cards to the residents of Rawah. Each platoon was given a specific battle-space in order to *build trusted networks* within their assigned neighborhoods. Without continuous security throughout the city it did not matter if the people were sympathetic to the government or not. They had to cooperate with the insurgents or risk being killed. The people had to have a sense of hope, not just for a better life, but also the feeling of dignity that comes from having to have some control in determining their future.<sup>16</sup> In order to protect the people we had to reduce the threat.

## VII. THE THREAT

The enemy, was ruthless, cunning and unpredictable. They and did not work on the D Co schedule. The enemy had freedom of maneuver and did not become decisively engaged so that they could continue to live to fight another day. The insurgents used coercion and persuasive methods to mobilize the populace to support their objectives and created a divide

between Marines and the local population. This divide destabilized the area and denied citizens of security within their governmental and social infrastructure. They continued to use suicide bombers, IEDs and small arms to break the will of the D Co Marines. Delta Company understood that the insurgent's greatest fear was a legitimate local IP Force, a functioning city council, and an IA Force executing interdicting patrols outside of the city. "Know your enemy, for he is the first to discover your weakness."<sup>17</sup> This axiom is applicable. Understanding the adversary, was key to eliminating the enemy's presence in the city. The Marines of Delta Company were mindful of their mission and where the insurgents were on the priority. Our number priority was not to kill or capture the enemy, but it was to train and equip the ISF. If the insurgents got in the way they were dealt with accordingly. Units in the past focused solely on hunting the insurgent and lost the focus on protecting the innocent people. When D Co began training the ISF, the Marines also offered protection to the local populace and denied the insurgents their sanctuary. Convincing the local populace that the Marines of D Co would provide a stable and secure community was the first step in winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi Citizens. The citizens of Rawah had to trust the Marines and Sailors of Delta Company.

There is one thing is common to every individual, team, organization, culture and civilization throughout the world---one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the greatest friendship, the strongest character. On the other hand, if developed and nurtured, the one thing has potential create unparalleled success and a foundation for life. That one thing is **trust**.<sup>18</sup> –Teddy Roosevelt

"Live Among the People," was another Kilcullen byline. The best source of information came from human intelligence, but the only way to bridge the *trust* gap was to get out and do good will. The risk incurred by the local populace who collaborated with the Marines usually resulted in death. Our daily interaction with the citizens of Rawah, afforded us the opportunity to address their main concerns for their city. Contrary to popular belief, the Iraqi citizens do not care about the strategic intentions of U.S. or the flow of oil. In addition to

our daily interaction with the local populace, we had weekly city council meetings with the local sheiks and they re-affirmed the concerns of what the general population wanted. Yassin Rafik, a city council member from Rawah, stated, “That our true concerns are at the basic level, for example; the amount of propane, or electricity they had to cook dinner with. Ultimately, we want security and the city to return back to normal.”<sup>19</sup> The only way to legitimize our actions was by our deeds, which addressed their needs. Delta Company Marines respected the culture and attempted to speak Arabic phrases. During our pre-deployment training D Co had fifteen Marines, complete a month long Iraqi culture and language immersion training. Daily interaction with the Iraqi citizen allowed D Co Marines to understand their behavioral patterns. We were no longer the “nasty infidels”, but rather people just like them. As the city infrastructure was restored, the intelligence from the local citizens enabled Marines and ISF to unveil weapons caches as well as the locations of IEDs. Delta Company’s constant presence on the city streets of Rawah, allowed for continuous information flow. Additionally, the progress enhanced small unit leader initiative, which gave the Marines of Delta Company a sense of accomplishment.

Our patience with community leaders to assume their leadership positions and our aggressive patrolling with ISF in order to establish a stable and secure environment was instrumental in bridging the trust gap with the local populace. We met with local leaders and sought information to determine their priorities and shortfalls. Using the census process the SUL were able to identify the municipality leaders and their respective jobs in only three months. They were responsible for identifying the local leaders of schools, mosques, medical clinics, and other elements of the infrastructure. Of the city leadership identified and their positions validated, the provincial government of Ramadi and our Civil Military Operations

(CMO) groups started to flow money to the local government. The funds provided contracts for local citizens in order to renovate the dilapidated electricity, water, sewer, and trash systems, currently in place. The Rawah City Clean-up Project was approved and implemented because of a junior officer and NCO initiative. The project served two purposes. First, it instilled a sense of pride in the local populace and in their city. Second, it reduced the amount of IED's being emplaced along the streets of Rawah. As a result of these projects, there was much more activity in the city, therefore, it increased the people's confidence in the ISF and the Marines of D Co. Empowering the NCO during home-station training directly contributed to the adaptive mindset required in a COIN environment.

### **VIII. THE MARINE AND ISF BOND**

The essence of cohesion is mutual recognition and a sense of belonging to organization that focuses on the unit over the individual. Delta Company lived with the ISF and executed hundreds of combined patrols, which generated camaraderie that was instrumental to our success in Rawah. This was a result of eating, fighting, living in close quarters, praying, and unfortunately, shedding blood together. The camaraderie between the ISF and Marines strengthened as the deployment progressed. The confidence of the ISF grew as they trained and patrolled with the Marines. As a result of their performance, they assumed their own battle-space within the city. I believe the attitude and swagger of the Marines and Sailors of Delta Company started to resonate among the ISF. Each patrol base throughout the city had American Civil War Battles associated with their patrol-base, which created a sense of identity within their platoon positions. Delta Company platoon commanders and the executive officer were mentors for the Iraqi Policeman and Iraqi Army Lieutenants. The majority of the success that was achieved should be attributed to the courage and bravery of the ISF and Marine small

unit leadership. As a result, the COIN mission got easier as our bond grew stronger. This relationship sounds easy to explain, but it is hard to accomplish.

If we had not been patient and persistent with the training of the ISF, we would not have experienced progress in the city of Rawah. The ISF efforts led to Delta Company having the highest capture rate in our battalion battle-space. Aside from the development of the ISF, the second most important reason for our progress in the region can be attributed to the discipline of the Marines refraining from any Law of War Violations. There were no Law of War Violations throughout our deployment, which directly related to the Marines winning the “hearts and minds” of the local populace. Small Unit leadership understood the mission and enforced the ROE to ensure the Marines they led understood them. Constant re-set training ensured that all Marines and Sailors understood ROE’s and Escalation of Force (EOF). The SNCOs and officers always emphasized that the vast majority of the people wanted a safe and stable environment.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

Developing cohesion within a unit and the will to fight is one of the greatest challenges a leader will face. Leadership, training, and small unit leadership are three essential aspects when teambuilding. Our unit values were integrated into all facets using elements of spirit such as mottoes, symbols, history, and records of high performance to maximum advantage.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, these are ways to establish a unit’s identity.

SNCOs and NCOs were instrumental in implementing and executing a comprehensive training regime during our home-station training that placed NCO’s in positions of responsibility not commensurate to their rank, therefore it afforded them an opportunity to assume positions of greater authority, which paid huge dividends during combat operations in

Iraq. The importance of small unit leadership is best summed up Brigadier General Laster when he said, “Battlefields are more complex, more decentralized, our enemy more ruthless, and never have we had more potential for our small unit leaders to determine our success as a Corps.”<sup>21</sup>

You can read the Fleet Manual 3-24 (The COIN Manual for the Marine Corps and Army) cover-to-cover, study David Galula, and eat soup with a knife, but if you cannot articulate your vision and commander’s intent down to the lowest common denominator, so they can execute, you will fail.

Delta Company enhanced and expedited the winning of the “hearts and minds” as opposed to the “hunt and kill” the insurgent mindset that fueled the insurgency. Iraqi Police forces and Iraqi Army strength increased as a result of the trust between the commander on the ground and the local leadership. These relationships with the people and ISF were the best source of intelligence, which led to uncovering of major caches and reduction of terrorist cells.

These observations are based on my experience as a light armored reconnaissance company commander in a battalion prepared for and executed combat operations in a COIN environment. In no way does this apply to the whole of Iraq, as each area is unique.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Brian W. Cavanaugh, "Inspirational Leadership: The Marine NCO." Marine Corps Gazette, April, 2008. p.39-42

<sup>2</sup> Major General Peter W. Chiarelli , and Major Patrick R. Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirement Full-Spectrum Operations." Military Review, October, 2006. pg 13-27

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government, "The American Heritage Dictionary: Team – Definition." 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Colonel David C. Garza, conversation with author, June, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Oren Harari, Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002),67.

<sup>6</sup> Lou Holtz, Wins, Losses, and Lessons (New York: Harpers Collins Publishing, 2006),95.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Government, "The American Heritage Dictionary: Adversity – Definition." 1982.

<sup>8</sup>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Government, "The American Heritage Dictionary: Tenet – Definition." 1982

<sup>10</sup> Vince Lombardi Jr., *What it takes to be # 1: Vince Lombardi on Leadership*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001) p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Kolenda, Leadership: The Warrior's Art. (Pennsylvania: Army War College Foundation Press, 2001), 312-313.

<sup>12</sup> Antoine Henri Jomini, A Summary of The Art of War. ( ),p60.

<sup>13</sup> Lou Holtz, Wins, Losses, and Lessons (New York: Harpers Collins Publishing, 2006),147.

<sup>14</sup> Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen's, "Twenty Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency." Military Review, June, 2006. p.134-135

<sup>15</sup> Esham Khamis, Rawah, Iraq City Councilman conversation with the author, November, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Darack and Major Matthew Tracy. "Killcullen's Principles in Action: Miracle in Anbar." Marine Corps Gazette, October, 2007.p 61-63.

<sup>17</sup> Wes Roberts, Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun. ( )

<sup>18</sup> Edmund Morris,. *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*. (New York: Random House Inc., 1979), p. 747.

<sup>19</sup> Yassin Rafik, Rawah, Iraq City Councilman conversation with the author, February, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Kolenda, Leadership: The Warrior's Art. (Pennsylvania: Army War College Foundation Press, 2001), p 71.

**APPENDIX A****Illustration 1: Hearts and Minds**

**APPENDIX B**

**Illustration 2: ISF and Marine bond.**

**APPENDIX C**

**Illustration 3: Delta Company**

## APPENDIX D

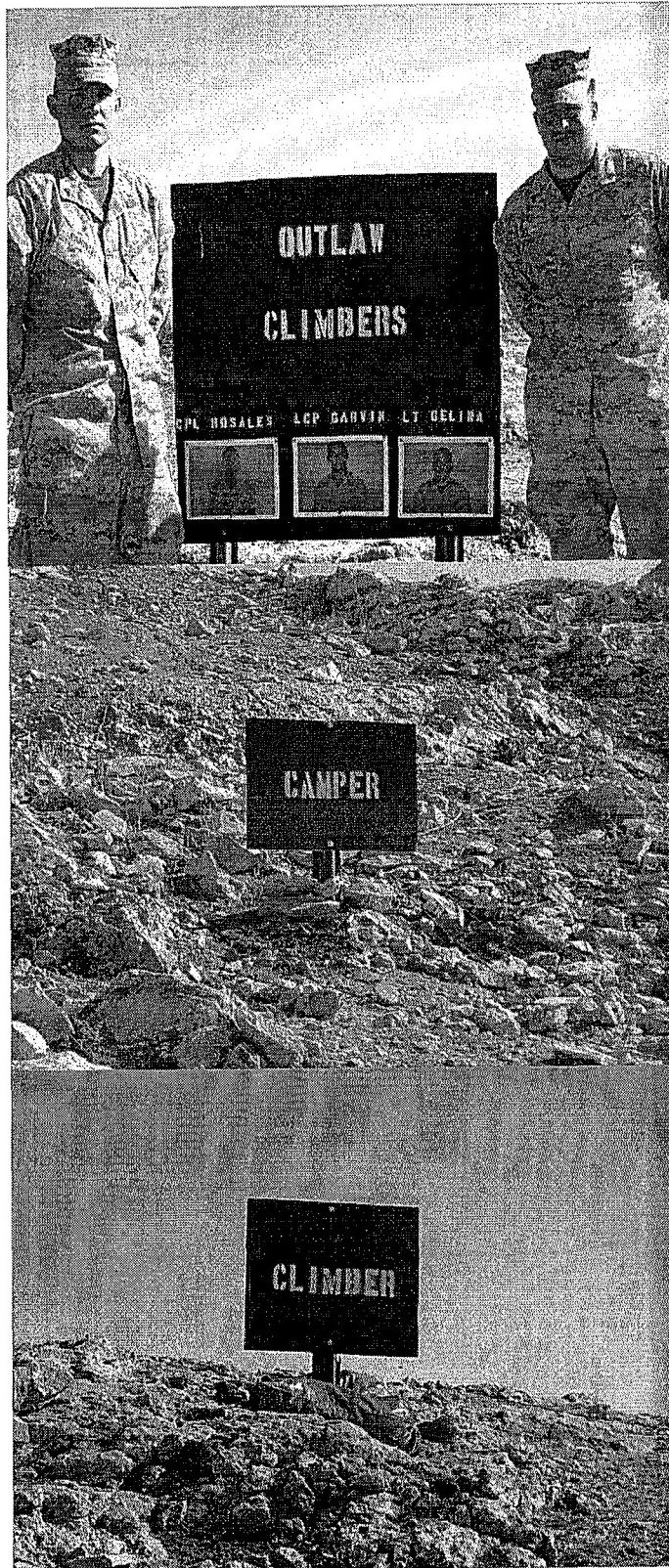


Illustration 4: Never Forget

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